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EDITED BY DON E. WILSON AND SUE RUFF

Texas antelope squirrel | *Ammospermophilus interpres*

The Texas antelope squirrel occupies the Chihuahuan Plateau of Mexico, western Texas, and south-central New Mexico. The species is restricted to rocky habitats on and around desert mountain ranges. In Trans-Pecos Texas, it occurs at elevations of 540–1,830 meters, but is most common between 1,050 and 1,650 meters. Remains of *A. interpres* have been recovered from prehistoric cave deposits in Coahuila, Mexico, and Val Verde County, Texas.

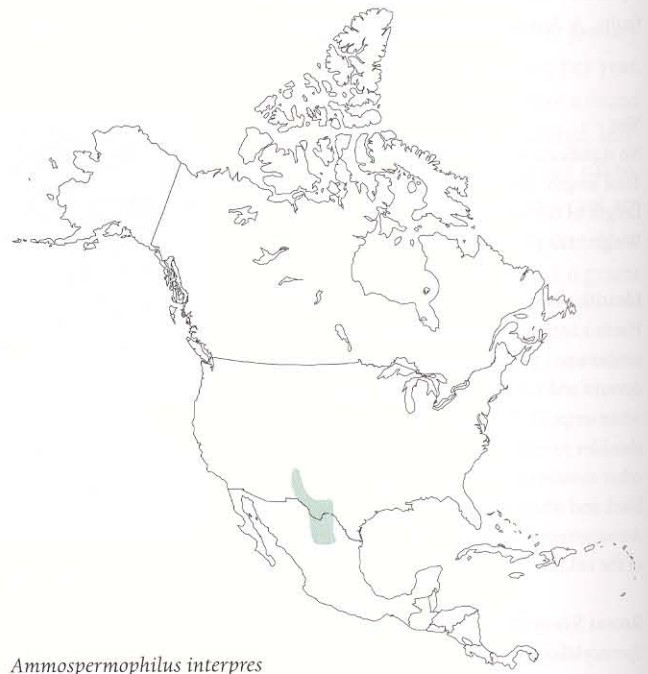
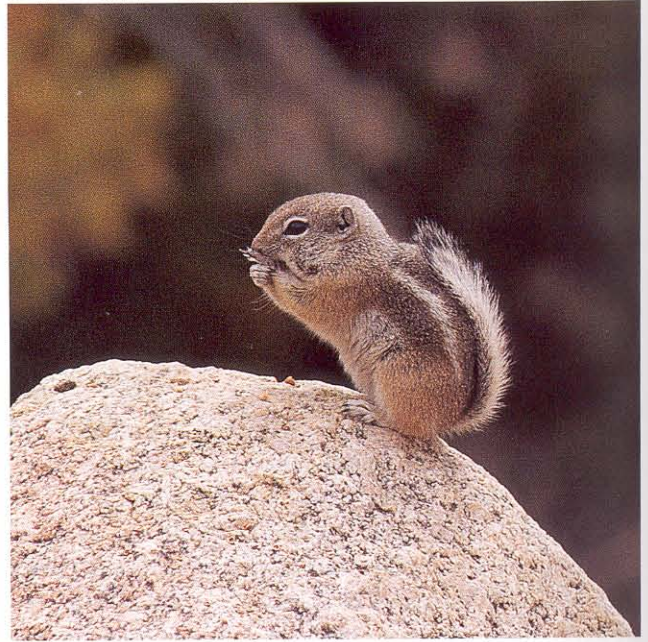
Fidgety, nervous, and seldom still for long, Texas antelope squirrels are nimble-footed and can run with surprising speed. Their peculiar habit of carrying the tail arched forward over the back, exposing to view the contrasting-colored undersurface, is a readily usable field characteristic of this genus. The nervous flickering of the tail when the animals are excited and the mellow, rolling, trill-like calls further help to identify them. *A. interpres* often sits on prominent boulders and on tops of junipers or large shrubs. It usually is seen running from bush to bush, sitting on a point of rock, or running over the rocks with its short, bushy tail curled tight over its rump. Its activities are restricted to daylight hours, with most activity occurring during the hottest parts of the day. It probably does not hibernate.

Ammospermophilus interpres has one white stripe bordered with blackish on each side of the body, no distinct head stripes, and hairs on the underside of the tail that are white medially. The back is gray. The shoulders, hips, and outer surface of its legs are yellowish-brown. The underside is white. The third of the tail nearest the body is the same color as the back; the rest is grayish-black. The tail is white beneath, with two black bands and a whitish border.

Breeding begins in February. One litter of 5 to 14 young is reared each year, but a second litter may be reared by some females. The young remain in the nest until they are about 25 percent of adult size, at which time they venture aboveground and begin eating solid foods. In May, half-grown young may be out of their burrows getting their own food, including various seeds and fruits, and climbing catclaw and mesquite bushes to secure ripening pods, which often are found scattered in abundance about their burrows.

The Texas antelope squirrel is found in habitats with creosote-bush, tarbush, lechuguilla, and sotol, and in desert, grassland, and woodland habitats. It does not occur far away from boulders and areas with junipers and large shrubs. It is most common on hard-surface gravelly washes or rocky slopes, and is less common or absent on level, sandy terrain. Canyons, bare cliffs, and rocks seem to be factors determining the range of the Texas antelope squirrel.

It usually lives in burrows, but crevices in and between rocks may serve as den sites. It makes use of abandoned burrows of other rodents and there usually is no mound of earth to mark



Ammospermophilus interpres

the entrance. It burrows under the edge of boulders or around the base of bushes or cacti. One burrow was 9 centimeters in diameter, 3 meters in length, and access was by three openings. Midway in the tunnel was the nest chamber, which measured 135 by 18 by 10 centimeters. The nest was composed of rabbit fur, shredded bark, feathers, dry grasses, and bits of cotton.

The diet consists of a variety of seeds, berries, and insects,

including the seeds, fruit, and fleshy parts of many species of cactus. The beans of mesquite and various other legumes are gathered for food, as are the seeds of creosote-bush, sotol, yucca, juniper, salt grass, ripe fruits of cactus, and other seed-bearing plants. In spring and early summer, considerable green vegetation is eaten. One Texas antelope squirrel had eaten so much cactus fruit that its muscles were tinted throughout with the purple color of the fruit. Internal cheek pouches are used to carry food.

In western Texas, *A. interpres* occurs in the same habitat as rock squirrels, pocket gophers, Nelson's pocket mice, cactus

mice, pinyon mice, deer mice, white-throated and Mexican woodrats, yellow-nosed cotton rats, eastern and desert cottontails, ring-tails, and mule deer. On the lava beds of southern New Mexico, it occurs with rock squirrels, gray-footed chipmunks, rock pocket mice, deer mice, spotted skunks, coyotes, and bobcats. In Mexico, *A. interpres* is an important food source for predators, including humans, because it is numerous and easy to capture.

The caecum of one Texas antelope squirrel contained numerous nematodes of the family *Oxyuridae*, but no other parasites are known. *T. L. Best*

Size

No significant sexual dimorphism

Total length: 220–235 (226) mm

Length of tail: 68–84 (74) mm

Weight: 99–122 (110) g

Identification

The Texas antelope squirrel is medium-sized and has the longest tail and hind limbs in the genus. Compared to *A. leucurus*, *A. interpres* is

smaller, darker, and two distinct black bands are visible on the undersurface of the tail; *A. leucurus* has a single band. Compared to *A. harrisi*, which is similar in dorsal coloration, *A. interpres* can be distinguished by the white on the medial undersurface of the tail; the undersurface of the tail of *A. harrisi* is gray.

Recent Synonyms

Tamias interpres

Other Common Names

Trader spermophile

Status

Common

References

Mammalian Species 365; Bailey, 1931